

Programs are held for the whole church and for organizations in the church. Programs inspire, inform and provide ways for people to interact to carry out the mission of the church.

Common Practices

Most churches have organizations that regularly schedule meetings. They often have a program chairperson who is responsible for choosing topics for the year and planning the programs with a committee. These leaders are responsible for seeing that the group experiences a balance of worship, service projects, study and times just to enjoy being together. They often are responsible for only part of the meeting, with other time set apart for business and refreshments. Churches also have all-church dinners or programs on special topics open to all church members. Sometimes these are planned by a committee, such as a hunger meal prepared by the stewardship and mission committee. On some occasions, such as a church anniversary, a special committee is established to plan the program.

Responsibilities

When you're asked to plan a program, your first responsibility is to begin planning long before the program is to take place. You may plan programs for a year at a time or

for a one-time occasion. Not allowing enough lead time limits your choices of resources and topics. Keep in mind that it may take a month for films to arrive and some speakers set their calendars six months or more in advance.

You may be responsible for:

- Forming a committee to help you. Program planning is not something you should do alone. Also, the more people are involved in the planning process, the more interest and ownership they will have.
- Developing a topic. Begin with the purpose or mission of the group as the informing concept. Then discover interests or needs of the group, suggest a variety of topics and choose from among them. You'll need to know how much the group already knows on the subject and programs they have had. The topic will in part be determined by the amount of time you have. You can choose a much broader topic for a day-long retreat than for a half-hour program. Once you have determined the general topic, give it a title that will get people's attention and interest.
- Finding out whether worship is part of the program. If so, are you to plan it as an integral part of the program or will someone else plan it? Worship and program should complement each other.
- Determining specific attainable goals for the program. While you may want the goal to be "to be

better Christians," that's more than one program can do. Consider the expectations of the group. Do they expect inspiration, information, action or entertainment? The goals should tell what you expect to happen as a result of your efforts. You'll be able to evaluate how well that happened at the end of the program.

You'll probably have several goals for each program based on what the participants want. Some will be about the way the participants interact: "to let everyone actively participate" and "to have an opportunity for people to work together in small groups." Others will be about the subject matter: "to learn about the denomination's Hunger Action Fund," "to learn about possible hunger projects for our group," "to explore the impact of population on hunger," and "to learn how Congress has dealt with hunger in the last two years."

- Selecting from available resources. Resources are people, places or things that can inform or have meaning for those who use them. Books, magazines, films, slides, videotapes, records, audiotapes, pamphlets, television programs, experts and people who attend the program can be resources. So can a collection of antiques, musical instruments, a museum, rocks, flowers or a bowl of rice. Resources are to be chosen after you know what job is

to be done. Find out about resources from your association, conference, the United Church of Christ national bodies, ecumenical groups, your local library and your pastor. You will develop some resources yourselves like worksheets, questionnaires and role-plays. Discover as many resources on the topic as you can and then decide which among them best suit your group and the setting.

- Determining the methods or techniques to use in presenting the topic. The number of participants and the available facilities will help determine techniques. Some techniques work better with five people than a hundred. If the group can barely squeeze into the room and other rooms aren't available, there's no way to divide into small groups. Consider the room size, seating, number of rooms and sound system. Also consider the physical limitations of group members. Moving from room to room, hearing many voices at one time, standing for a long time and seeing a video may all be impossible for some people.

Techniques include lectures, panel discussions, demonstrations, interviews, role-plays, group discussions and dialogues. They can be combined in one program, and should be if time allows. Three or four techniques can be included in a program of one to two hours: panel, discussion in

small groups, questions to the panel and summary statements by the panel. Choose methods that provide maximum participation and interest and that build on each other. For example, it's difficult to ask questions before you know something about the subject, so some kind of presentation (exhibit of items, video, play, lecture) needs to precede questions or discussion. Try working out several patterns or combinations of resources and techniques and discuss which would be preferable and why.

- Outlining the program in time blocks, deciding who will be responsible for each part and what resources will be needed. Include time in the program to let the participants know the purpose of the program, what to expect (outline the agenda) and what is expected of them, how each technique works, and who resource people are and what their qualifications are.
- Assigning responsibilities for leadership during the program, setting up the rooms and equipment, handling publicity and securing resources (contacting people, ordering videos, getting refreshments, finding pencils and paper, reproducing questionnaires, having tape as well as newsprint and markers). Leaders and resource people should be informed of the goals of the program and background of the participants.

- Checking in with all responsible. This may be a meeting if the planning group hasn't met for a while, or it may be a series of telephone calls.
- Arriving early for the program to oversee last-minute details, to see that others have carried out their responsibilities and to double-check supplies. Make certain leaders know what to do and how long to do it.
- Evaluating what took place. The participants may fill out a questionnaire, have a chance to call out what they liked or didn't like, or make recommendations in small groups. The planning group also can evaluate from their observations and feelings so that future program planners can know what worked and what didn't.

Skills and Attributes Needed

- Ability to work with other people.
- Ability to plan.
- Attention to detail.
- Understanding of the group.
- Understanding of group process and learning styles.

Ways to Increase Skills, Knowledge and Effectiveness

- Attend workshops on program planning or designing meetings

sponsored by your conference or association or another organization.

- Talk to people for whom you are planning the program.
- Become familiar with the group.
- Participate on Program Planning Teams.

Issues Facing the Church

- Sometimes people's interests don't seem to be the same as the church's mission. How do you attract participants then? Does it say something about your church's mission?
- Often people planning programs hurry around at the last minute to find resources. How can you begin to plan far enough in advance for adequate preparation?
- The assumption in many churches is that the pastor and the official leaders are responsible for programs. How can other people become responsible for initiating programs?

Questions

- How long in advance do you think you should begin planning a program for which you are responsible?
- Do you know the goals for the program you are planning?
- What part of program planning do you do best?

- What is one way you could improve your program planning skills?